United Nations A/60/128

General Assembly

Distr.: General
18 July 2005

Original: English

Sixtieth session
Item 64 of the provisional agenda*
Social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family

Report of the Secretary-General

Follow-up to the implementation of the International Year of Volunteers**

Summary

The present report is submitted in response to General Assembly resolution 57/106 entitled "Follow-up to the International Year of Volunteers", in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report to it at its sixtieth session on the implementation of that resolution, which provided an overview of the actions taken during the International Year and presented conclusions and recommendations for follow-up.

For the period since 2001, it is clear that the momentum built up over the course of the International Year has continued to provide the stimulation behind a vibrant volunteer movement. Most of the recommendations proposed by the General Assembly in resolution 57/106 are being taken up by Governments and the United Nations system, as well as by other stakeholders from civil society and the private sector. There are, however, wide variations in trends between countries and regions and this unevenness needs to be addressed if volunteerism is to realize its full potential for contributing to many of today's global challenges.

Volunteerism, when properly channelled, is a powerful force for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. The present report highlights for further attention by Governments and other actors, the principal areas where, building on the achievements of the International Year, the environment for expanded and diversified levels of volunteerism can be strengthened.

* A/60/150.

** The late submission of the present report was due to the need to ensure a comprehensive verification of inputs from a very broad range of stakeholders.

05-42849 (E) 180805

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I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 52/17 of 20 November 1997, the General Assembly proclaimed 2001 as the International Year of Volunteers in recognition of the valuable contribution of voluntary action in addressing global issues. The four objectives of the Year were the enhancement of volunteerism in all its forms in terms of recognition, promotion, facilitation and networking, with a view to generating increased awareness of the achievements and further potential of volunteer activity; encouraging more people to volunteer; and channelling resources to augment the effectiveness of participation through volunteerism by all segments of the population. The United Nations Volunteers was designated as the focal point for the Year's preparation, implementation and follow-up.

2. To assist in preparing for and implementing activities for the International Year, some 123 national committees and scores of local, regional and state committees were formed. The Internet played a crucial role in disseminating information about the Year and engaging large numbers of stakeholders at all levels. By the end of 2001, measures had been taken or were under consideration in every part of the world to enhance the environment for voluntary action. In its resolution 56/38 of 5 December 2001, the General Assembly recommended ways in which Governments and the United Nations system could support volunteering. In its resolution 57/106 of 26 November 2002, the Assembly inter alia reaffirmed the important role of volunteerism for meeting the goals set out in the United Nations Millennium Declaration and at other major United Nations conferences, summits and special sessions and their follow-up meetings. In the same resolution, the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report to it at its sixtieth session on the implementation of that resolution.

3. The present report considers progress made in following up on the immediate outcome of the International Year of Volunteers in the main areas highlighted in the two General Assembly resolutions mentioned above from the perspective of the Year's four main objectives. It also considers how to bring volunteerism into the mainstream and its inclusion in deliberations at international forums and the work of the United Nations system. The report concludes with some recommendations for the future. It is based on a global survey commissioned by the United Nations Volunteers as part of its functions as the focal point for follow-up to the International Year, covering a range of stakeholders from Governments to the United Nations system, civil society, parliamentarians, the media, academia and the private sector. The United Nations Development Programme, through its country offices, played an important role in the collection of information from developing countries. An Internet survey was also conducted to solicit information from the general public.

4. The report takes into account the outcome of a number of conferences and workshops that have taken place since 2001 on the topic of volunteerism. In addition, the report has benefited from a network of contacts with the volunteer community in developing countries built up by the United Nations Volunteers both in the period immediately leading up to the International Year and subsequently, and with networks of partner organizations, most notably the European Volunteer Centre, the Inter-American Development Bank, the International Association for Volunteer Effort, the International Business Leaders Forum, the International

Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the World Alliance for Citizen Participation.

II. The changing environment

5. The environment for an expansion of volunteerism worldwide is as favourable as it has ever been. The concept of a global society is emerging, with shifting relationships between the North and the South, most notably away from the giver and receiver model. Opportunities for citizens to be engaged through voluntary action at the local level and have their action recorded and recognized are steadily expanding. Acceptance is spreading for the idea that all people have a right to development and that active participation through volunteerism is one important avenue for exercising that right. New communication technologies make it ever more possible to build contacts and support networks among individual volunteers and organizations that involve volunteers on a local, regional and global basis. In this connection, the value added by partnerships between Governments, civil society and the private sector is increasingly an important feature of the development dialogue.

6. On the other hand, poverty, inequality and insecurity are as acute as at any time in history, with reports in some quarters of declining levels of trust and respect between people both within and between countries. These are, in fact, two sides of the same coin. Never have opportunities for the expansion and diversification of volunteerism been greater, while the need for action in this area by Governments and the United Nations system has never been more pressing. The present report provides evidence of the beginning of a trend towards a greater recognition on the part of Governments and other stakeholders of the value added by volunteerism and of the need to ensure a favourable environment within which voluntary action can flourish. It also highlights the fact that much greater effort is called for.

7. The report should be read bearing in mind that preparations for the International Year of Volunteers were at an advanced stage when the United Nations Millennium Declaration was adopted by all Member States in September 2000. Hence, the context provided by the Declaration and by the Millennium Development Goals was not made explicit in the International Year's objectives nor, indeed, in planning for the Year. Nonetheless, in the implementation of and follow-up to the Year, there has been a growing acceptance of the notion of linking volunteerism to addressing the aspirations of the Millennium Declaration, in terms of pronouncements at global, regional and local levels as well as through action at all levels. Indeed, it is barely conceivable that the Millennium Development Goals will be achieved without the efforts, creativity and solidarity of many millions of ordinary citizens through voluntary action. The General Assembly, in its resolution 57/106, anticipated this development by recognizing that volunteer contributions would help to achieve the goals and objectives set out in the Millennium Declaration and by requesting that the Secretary-General factor such contributions into his reports on the implementation of the Declaration.

III. Progress in implementation

8. Determining trends in levels of volunteering with any great precision remains a challenge. Measurement is still largely limited to a number of industrialized countries, although steps are now being taken in a few developing countries to produce statistical data. The picture is mixed. In many countries it is clear that some high-profile events, such as the response to natural disasters, including the December 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami and a number of major sports occasions such as the 2004 Olympic Games, have raised the profile of volunteering and encouraged more people to become actively engaged. In other cases, the United Nations itself has been instrumental in keeping volunteering at the forefront of the development agenda. The HIV/AIDS pandemic appears to have catalysed voluntary action from communities in support of victims and their families. There is growing evidence of steady improvements in access to information about opportunities to volunteer, while online volunteering and employee volunteering in the private sector are beginning to demonstrate their potential for attracting far larger numbers of people into volunteer activities. On the other hand, there are also signs that in some countries the lack of promotion of volunteerism by the Government and disinterest on the part of the media and other potential stakeholders, have conspired to limit the expansion of the volunteer base.

A. Recognition

9. Public awareness and recognition of volunteer actions and of the contribution of volunteerism in general continues to grow. It is being stimulated in many countries by International Volunteer Day, which is itself becoming a well-established and supported global event in many parts of the world, with ever strengthening links to the Millennium Development Goals. Conferences, seminars and press releases in major newspapers are often a feature of the Day. For International Volunteer Day in 2004, for example, national newspapers in Indonesia carried public service announcements on volunteering; the principal newspapers in Israel and the Palestinian Authority issued special editions; a book on volunteerism was launched by the Secretariat of the Ministry of Youth and Sports of Bangladesh; and speeches were given by senior government officials in many countries, including Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Chile, Ghana, Honduras, Japan, Lithuania, Mauritius, Mozambique, Nepal, Nicaragua, Pakistan, Peru and South Africa.

10. Other examples abound of providing recognition. The International Year of Volunteers national committee of Togo has established a memorial to volunteerism and a street in Maputo was named Rua dos Voluntarios. National volunteer days have been declared for 11 June in the Sudan and 10 July in Tunisia; special weeks of volunteers have been instigated in Hungary, Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation; a Year of the Volunteer was designated in Thailand in 2002 and in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in 2005; and summer volunteer campaigns have been initiated in Viet Nam. Australia introduced in 2005 a Pride of Australia medal to honour outstanding volunteer achievement; Italy has created an Oscar of Volunteering award ceremony; annual presidential volunteer awards were introduced in Honduras and Mexico; and a Sharjah Voluntary Award is the first of its kind in the United Arab Emirates.

11. Print and broadcast media coverage of voluntary action has grown steadily in a number of countries since 2001. There are now television talk shows in some countries, such as Albania, Spain and the United Kingdom; radio programmes are broadcast in Cameroon, Israel, Jordan, Senegal and the Sudan; documentary films have been made in Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago; and national media campaigns have been held in Mexico and Zambia. Some countries, including Bolivia, Brazil, Kazakhstan and Uruguay, are seeing an increasing amount of radio and television time dedicated to discussions of voluntary action.

12. The Indian Ocean tsunami disaster gave further impetus to growing news coverage in recognition of the close to 1 million individuals who volunteered in support of relief efforts. Progress is also being made on the qualitative front, as media coverage increasingly links volunteerism to development issues. There are also visible trends in some countries of a move away from depicting volunteering as a charitable act of giving towards a concept of reciprocity, with benefits accruing to the person undertaking the voluntary act as well as to the target person or group. Stereotyping of volunteering, however, is still a feature of the media in many countries with some confusion with regard to definitions and motivations.

13. Research is important in order to establish culturally sensitive definitions of volunteerism, to determine its scale and characteristics and to assist in the development of policies that recognize and support voluntary action. Research on volunteerism undertaken since 2001 in developing countries and countries with economies in transition, however, is still a very small proportion of the totality of research on voluntary action. As a result, the specific features of voluntary action in many parts of the world and issues specific to concerned countries, continue to be poorly reflected. There have, however, been some noteworthy exceptions in the period after 2001. Research in Mauritania on volunteering in the national context will serve as a comprehensive reference document and tool for future action; in Albania, a book was published on volunteerism as a multifunctional element of national society; the legal framework for volunteering was the subject of research in Croatia; the first national survey in Mexico was sponsored by a civil society association that promotes volunteerism; and a number of Governments, including in the Czech Republic, Germany, Ghana, Hungary, Indonesia, Spain, Switzerland and Thailand, are also supporting research into volunteer issues.

14. One important development was the publication by the United Nations in 2003 of the *Handbook on Non-Profit Institutions in the System of National Accounts*.[1] This calls on national statistical offices to prepare a "satellite account" on the non-profit sector, including the value of voluntary action, as part of their regular economic data gathering and reporting. The United Nations Volunteers is collaborating with the Center for Civil Society Studies at Johns Hopkins University to implement the volunteer component of the *Handbook*. The significant advance in the quality of basic information on volunteerism around the world that should result from this exercise is expected to help considerably to increase awareness of the economic contribution of volunteerism and to facilitate the formulation of appropriate and supportive policy frameworks.

B. Promotion

15. An important feature of the International Year of Volunteers was the effort made to promote volunteerism among the broadest possible cross section of societies. This point was originally made by the General Assembly at its twenty-fourth special session, held in Geneva in 2000, which called for the promotion of the contribution that volunteerism can make as an additional mechanism for social integration.[2] There is a growing recognition that volunteering, if properly supported, can empower those involved in terms of acquisition of skills and experience, satisfaction from being actively engaged and the potential benefits derived from building up reciprocal arrangements. This has given rise to a variety of efforts to promote and facilitate voluntary action among specific segments of the population.

16. The segment of the population most consistently targeted has been youth, especially school and university students, in part because in many countries young people make up a large proportion of the population. From a national perspective, promoting volunteering among youth is a means of creating a sustainable volunteer culture and combating negative images of young people. Some Governments have sought to incorporate volunteering by young people into social policy.

17. Volunteerism is a key element in the Youth National Strategic Plan of Mozambique; in China, the Go West Programme has been sending student volunteers to the poorest areas in the west of the country since 2003; university students in Bolivia are mobilized to work in municipalities throughout the country within the framework of the country's Strategy to Fight Poverty; the Governments of Brazil and the Russian Federation provide official support for major volunteer-related events such as Global Youth Service Day; and official assistance for supplying, building and renovating premises for use by volunteer youth groups is provided in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Dominican Republic, Peru and Rwanda. The Syrian Arab Republic held its first symposium on promoting volunteerism among school students with support from Junior Chamber International in 2005. Also in 2005, the Sudan held its first National Symposium on Volunteering for Peace and Development, focusing on local volunteer activities in the peace process. At the regional level, the European Union and the United Nations Volunteers manage a joint initiative in the Balkans, which supports exchanges of young volunteers among countries of the region helping to promote peaceful coexistence.

18. While youth has been a primary focus of attention for many countries, there have been some examples of attention to other social groups. In Guatemala, the focus has been on supporting voluntary associations of indigenous women; in Bolivia and Luxembourg, efforts have been made to integrate people with disabilities into voluntary work; and in Viet Nam, the National Coordination Committee on Disability helped to organize a conference on volunteerism in vocational training and employment for disadvantaged children. The European Volunteer Centre met in Romania in 2005, focusing on the theme "Volunteering for all ages: summit of generations", with the participation of 10 countries discussing approaches to addressing volunteer needs of different age groups. Over 10,000 volunteers work with the Correctional Service of Canada helping offenders to reintegrate by bridging the gap between the institution and communities.

19. For many disadvantaged segments of the population, however, serious challenges remain. On the side of the individual, for whom finding paid work is

often a priority concern, the contribution voluntary action can make to enhance job prospects is not always obvious. For organizations that involve volunteers, these segments of society may be perceived as problematic and not worth an investment of time and effort. Exclusion from opportunities to volunteer follows exclusionary patterns experienced in other areas. Governments need to be aware of such tendencies and prepared to take measures to address them.

20. Ready access to information on how and where to volunteer is invaluable as a means of extending the base of volunteerism and, in this context, the spread of information and communications technology is a great asset. The number of countries that have created online databases and websites listing volunteer opportunities is growing steadily. Since 2001, these have included Albania, Argentina, Australia, Bhutan, Chile, Colombia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Germany, Ireland, Japan, Kenya, Lebanon, Mexico, Nicaragua, Pakistan, Paraguay, Sweden, Thailand, Togo, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Uzbekistan and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of). Such facilities are proving to be highly effective in reaching segments of the population that, because of lack of mobility and other factors, were previously excluded from participating in voluntary action.

C. Facilitation

21. Advances since 2001 in the recognition and promotion of voluntary action have been backed up by efforts to facilitate volunteerism through the establishment and strengthening of human and physical infrastructure. There is a growing appreciation of the need to structure and support volunteers in a more professional way, leading to a broader acceptance of the notion of fostering systems of volunteer management. Jamaica has supported the creation of a national registry of volunteers, which is used to record and recognize volunteer contributions. In Colombia, the government department concerned with coordinating the country's solidarity economy has been tasked with facilitating voluntary action. A National Network of Organizations Promoting Volunteerism has been established in Japan, supported by the Government, volunteer-involving organizations, the private sector and academia. The training of managers in public and private sector volunteer programmes is becoming more widespread, although civil society organizations involving volunteers appear less inclined to take up the challenge, with financial considerations often cited as a major constraint. Systems of self-support through the development of partnerships and networks around volunteering are also spreading in both industrialized and developing countries, promoted by Governments and by civil society organizations. The creation of the "Mesa de Voluntariado" in Ecuador and the "Feria del Voluntariado" in Guatemala are examples of efforts by volunteer-involving organizations to enhance mutual assistance at the country level.

22. Private sector involvement in volunteering is a growing phenomenon in industrialized countries and is starting to make headway in developing countries as notions of corporate social responsibility take hold. Involvement ranges from employer-supported volunteer schemes and funding for volunteer projects, to building partnerships around volunteer-focused government and civil society initiatives. In some developing countries, such as Ghana, India, Lebanon and Nigeria, there are positive trends with evidence of companies considering philanthropic activities as social investment. A contributory factor to the

considerable progress being made in Brazil and the Philippines in this area is the presence of business-supporting organizations, respectively the Ethos Institute and the Philippine Business for Social Progress, with an interest in corporate social responsibility. In Jamaica, a government-supported association works with community groups and the private sector to mobilize volunteers to help identify and implement microlevel projects.

23. It is still largely the case, however, that while employees in developing countries often display strong traditions of undertaking voluntary work in their communities, long-term formal employee volunteer programmes have still to take hold. Where they do exist, they tend to be encouraged by multinational companies from developed countries. In some industrialized countries, local networks of businesses, known as corporate volunteer councils, have been formed to share effective practices and address community needs through workplace volunteering. There are lessons to be learned in this respect for developing countries. Given the very significant benefits to all stakeholders of enhancing relationships between businesses and the societies in which they operate through the promotion of volunteerism, this is an area of focus that requires more attention from Governments and other stakeholders.

24. Volunteering in the public sector is less visible except in relation to disaster situations such as floods and earthquakes, when there is normally a broad-based call for volunteers to assist. Large numbers of people in developing countries, however, are engaged in social and welfare services under local government administration in such fields as health, education and other welfare services for the infirm, older persons and people with disabilities. Economic cut backs in some of the poorest countries have seen voluntary associations and individual volunteers help to keep schools, clinics and day-care centres open. In addition, democratic processes in some countries have given rise to the formation of national consultative groups, which usually operate on a voluntary basis.

25. Investment in physical infrastructure is one very concrete expression of official support for volunteering. A range of actions have been taken since 2001 in many countries, including the creation of presidential agencies for volunteerism, national volunteer agencies, national volunteer centres and networks of regional and local volunteer centres. National volunteer centres have been established in Madagascar and the Russian Federation and a volunteer development centre has been set up in Indonesia. Civil society has also been active in establishing volunteer centres in such countries as Cape Verde and Egypt, while a volunteer information and communication technology centre was created in Jordan.

26. National legislation on volunteering was identified during the International Year of Volunteers as an important determinant of a flourishing volunteer movement. Since 2001, significant pieces of legislation supportive of voluntary activity have been passed or are being formulated, in particular Eastern Europe and Latin America, two regions where the movement towards democratic processes continues. In Albania and Mozambique, laws were passed dealing with the relationship between volunteers and volunteer-involving organizations; and legal provisions now exist for the further development of volunteerism in Argentina, Colombia, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Peru, the Russian Federation and Uruguay. Laws were enacted on volunteering by youth in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Czech Republic. In Poland, a law will enable non-governmental organizations to

develop closer working relationships with the public administration and provide new opportunities for the non-profit sector to diversify its human resource base. In Benin, a law on decentralization encourages the promotion of volunteerism and community initiatives.

27. Other legislation has covered a wide range of issues, including recognition of the legal status of volunteers in Australia, Belgium and Canada; regulating volunteering in France; dealing with the status of volunteers under labour laws in the United States; dealing with social welfare issues in Italy and Thailand; and creating tax incentives in Algeria, Lebanon, Mauritius, Spain and Togo. In Indonesia, a service visa was introduced to permit volunteers from outside the country to receive tax and customs benefits. Immigration regulations for foreign volunteers have been eased in Brazil, Canada and South Africa. Notwithstanding these encouraging examples, there is still much to be done. Indeed, there is a need for changes in some existing legislation that has a negative impact on volunteering, including barriers to international volunteering schemes. In recognition of the importance of the topic and the interest of a growing number of countries, in 2004 the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the United Nations Volunteers prepared and disseminated widely in various languages a *Guidance Note on Volunteerism and Legislation*.

D. Networking

28. General Assembly resolution 57/106 called for the development of a global Internet volunteer resource website. Launched on 5 December 2002, the World Volunteer Web portal (www.worldvolunteerweb.org), plays a pivotal role in encouraging global sharing of information about how volunteerism can contribute to economic and social development. One success indicator is that in 2003, the first year of the website's existence, over 300,000 network organizations and individuals from almost every Member State visited the site, viewing some 1.5 million pages. In 2004, the number of visits to the site by organizations and individuals, as well as pages viewed, increased by over 25 per cent. Monthly newsletters, introduced in 2004, have over 20,000 subscribers from every part of the world and the number is rising. Google, the world's most popular Internet search engine, regularly indexes information published on the portal's news service, taking the website to a far wider global audience.

29. With support from OneWorld (www.oneworld.net), a civil society news portal with a network of over 1,500 organizations, the World Volunteer Web portal launched a first online discussion forum on volunteering and environmental sustainability, enabling around 700 people from over 100 countries to share ideas on the topic. Discussions on other Millennium Development Goals and volunteerism are planned in partnership with the Millennium Campaign. The Volunteer Web portal also serves as a global networking hub for International Volunteer Day national focal points, promotes sharing of best practices and provides guidance on the organization of related events and campaigns. Steps have been taken to establish a platform that will accommodate regional portals, enable online volunteers to become involved in building the site and facilitate interactive services to allow users to contribute. A regional website has also been developed by the Inter-American Development Bank, through its Inter-American Initiative on Social Capital, Ethics and Development, containing best practices and related news on volunteerism.

E. Bringing volunteerism into the mainstream

30. One important recommendation to have emerged from the International Year of Volunteers was to integrate volunteerism into national development planning. This is already the case in countries such as France, Luxembourg, Spain and the United Kingdom. Among countries with economies in transition, the Czech Republic and Hungary already consider volunteerism as integral to their development efforts. Bolivia is an example of a developing country whose economic and social planning reflects the contribution of voluntary action. Other countries moving ahead in this area include Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ghana, Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand. A major constraint continues to be the limited availability of specific data on volunteer contributions. The preparation and dissemination in 2001 by the United Nations Volunteers of a toolkit on measuring volunteering, now translated into a number of languages, has assisted several developing countries to move ahead with both national and local studies on the scale and profile of volunteering. An important development in efforts to raise the profile of volunteerism was the issuance in 2003 by the United Nations of the *Handbook on Non-Profit Institutions in the System of National Accounts*,[1] which includes a section on volunteering. The *Handbook* is being used in 43 countries, 9 of which are the subject of a joint pilot initiative, led by the United Nations Volunteers and Johns Hopkins University, which focuses on the volunteer component of the *Handbook*.

31. References in national Human Development Reports to volunteerism are an indicator of the extent to which volunteerism is entering the mainstream of development thinking. Examples where this has occurred subsequent to 2001 include Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ecuador, Egypt, Honduras, India (at the state level), Indonesia, Serbia and Montenegro (Kosovo), the Philippines, South Africa and Yemen. Such formal recognition of the value added of volunteerism and its incorporation into mainstream advocacy and policy instruments, needs to be extended to many other countries.

32. Progress has been less than satisfactory in raising awareness in donor countries about the link between what is generally seen in donor countries as a valuable social and economic contribution to society and as local traditions of voluntary self-help and mutual aid in developing countries and countries with economies in transition. For the latter, volunteerism represents a vast untapped constituency in support of development efforts that is worthy of donor support. One example where the link is being made is the Southern Africa Capacity Initiative, an initiative led by the United Nations Development Programme in nine countries seriously affected by HIV/AIDS, which is supported by major donors. For the first time, a key initiative of the international community has as one of its principal components the mobilization of domestic volunteer resources to augment and strengthen local capacity, in this case to address a serious pandemic.

33. All donor countries send their nationals overseas as volunteers through programmes managed by both the Government and the private sector and a few, including Ireland, Luxembourg, Switzerland and the United Kingdom, are now mobilizing exchange of volunteers among developing countries. However, volunteering abroad by nationals does not generally form part of official development aid policy frameworks. In this regard, the example of Japan, which revised its Official Development Assistance Charter in 2003 to include provision for

fostering participation of its citizens in volunteer activities in development abroad, is encouraging.

F. International forums

34. General Assembly resolution 57/106 called on the Secretary-General to factor volunteer contributions into discussions at major United Nations forums. There were a number of opportunities after the International Year of Volunteers for volunteerism to be included in discussions at such events. The Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, 2002, adopted at the Second World Assembly on Ageing,[3] refers to participation of older persons in volunteer activities as contributing to the growth and maintenance of personal well-being and proposes action to facilitate such participation. The Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development,[4] held in Johannesburg in 2002, includes volunteer groups among the stakeholders for whom partnerships between Governments and non-governmental actors need to be enhanced. The Plan of Action of the World Summit on the Information Society,[5] held in Geneva in 2003, emphasizes how volunteering can be a valuable asset for raising human capacity to make productive use of information and communication technology tools and build a more inclusive information society. The report of the World Conference on Disaster Reduction,[6] held in Kobe, Japan, in 2005, recognizes the importance of involving volunteers in strategies for disaster reduction and proposes a number of recommendations, such as promoting the strategic management of volunteer resources, involving volunteers in community-based training initiatives and establishing or strengthening national, regional and international volunteer corps.

35. Several other international forums have taken place building on the momentum of the International Year of Volunteers. One example, at the global level, was the 108th Conference of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, held in Santiago in 2003, which adopted a resolution on strengthening democratic institutions. The resolution recognizes that volunteerism builds strong cohesive communities, encourages participation in the democratic process and reduces social tensions by forging a common view, and it encourages further support. The first International Conference on Volunteerism and the Millennium Development Goals, held in Islamabad in 2004 with representatives from volunteer-involving organizations in the public and private sectors, the media, civil society organizations and grass-roots activists, explored the role of volunteerism in helping to achieve each of the eight Millennium Development Goals and outlined actions needed to enhance the environment for collective and individual volunteer support of the Goals.

36. At the regional level, the European Conference and Exchange Forum about Volunteering (Eurofestation 2004), held in 2004 in the Netherlands during that country's presidency of the European Union, was attended by representatives from a broad range of stakeholders in volunteerism. A European Roadmap to 2010 for volunteerism was agreed at the Conference, targeted at the European Union and its member States, as well as at the corporate sector and non-governmental organizations. The Inter-American Development Bank has sponsored events on social capital, ethics and volunteerism for development in Brazil, Chile, Peru and Uruguay. The International Association for Volunteer Effort organized international conferences in Seoul and Barcelona, Spain, in 2002 and 2004, respectively. In 2005, an international forum was held in Beijing on volunteer service and the Olympics to

launch that city's organizing committee for the twenty-ninth Olympiad; an international volunteerism congress was held in Madrid at which representatives from international and European volunteer-involving organizations discussed ways to promote and support volunteerism; and an international workshop was organized in Ouagadougou by the Foundation for Political Innovation and the Institute for Modern Africa to look at various themes for Africa, one being the economy of volunteering.

G. United Nations system

37. Levels of awareness on the roles and contributions of volunteers within the United Nations system have increased since the International Year of Volunteers, although there is unevenness among the various organizations in developing a proactive approach to recognizing and promoting voluntary action into mainstream programmes. The Department of Peacekeeping Operations of the Secretariat, the World Food Programme, the World Health Organization and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees have taken steps to sensitize their staff, for example by distributing material and placing volunteerism on the agenda of country and regional level meetings. Some websites, for example at the World Food Programme, carry articles on voluntary action in their areas of specialization. A number of organizations are actively participating at the country level in International Volunteer Day and involve United Nations Volunteers when briefing their staff. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization has carried out regional monitoring to gauge the extent to which there has been voluntary participation of stakeholders. The United Nations Children's Fund has comprehensively researched the state of volunteering within its national committees and plans to use the results to enhance the spirit of volunteerism.

38. Some United Nations organizations have prepared and disseminated publications on volunteering within their specialized areas of competence. The United Nations Development Programme, for example, dedicated in 2003 an edition of one of its flagship publications, *Essentials*, to synthesizing the main lessons learned and recommendations made on volunteerism and development, with a view to providing its country offices and headquarters easy access to the results of evaluations on the topic. The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS has produced and disseminated a publication on volunteering and greater involvement of people living with HIV/AIDS. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization has disseminated reports about the role of participation of volunteers in a major education programme. The United Nations Children's Fund has recognized ways in which volunteers contribute to that organization's strategic priorities. One noteworthy example of the United Nations taking volunteerism on board was the signing of a memorandum of understanding between the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the United Nations Volunteers in 2003, which includes a note on guiding principles emphasizing the desire of the two entities to work together to enhance an environment in which volunteerism is recognized as a significant element in the success of the Department's work. The note is serving as an example for other United Nations organizations.

39. There have also been improvements in the support provided by the United Nations system to volunteers. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization has developed a system to collect the thoughts of volunteers

on the quality of their experiences. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has developed an internal volunteering policy and established a volunteering focal point within its headquarters. The Department of Peacekeeping Operations is encouraging individual United Nations volunteers to participate in its training, learning and capacity-building initiatives.

40. At the level of targeted populations, several United Nations organizations are mobilizing voluntary action through the projects and programmes they support. The United Nations Human Settlements Programme, for example, encourages the voluntary involvement of youth in running and managing projects through organizing meetings, facilitating online discussions and undertaking peer-to-peer training. The United Nations Development Fund for Women has focused on the voluntary involvement of women through its national committees and through programme initiatives. The United Nations Population Fund promotes young peoples' involvement as volunteer leaders in HIV/AIDS programmes. The growth of new partnerships between United Nations organizations, volunteer-involving organizations from the private sector, self-help groups and community and faith-based organizations, is a positive sign that the United Nations system is moving towards a greater encouragement of participation through voluntary action.

41. The United Nations Volunteers was requested in General Assembly resolution 57/106 to continue its efforts, together with other stakeholders, to raise awareness of volunteerism, increase reference and networking resources and provide technical cooperation to developing countries, upon their request, in the field of volunteerism. An initial step taken by that organization after the International Year of Volunteers was to broaden its approach beyond the placement of international and national volunteers to encompass the promotion of all expressions of volunteerism for development, including the mobilization of volunteers. This was in recognition of the need to blend the ongoing work of managing volunteer assignments with responding to the desire of Member States to see the momentum from the International Year maintained and extended further.

42. The expanded approach has been characterized by action in four areas. The first has been to stimulate and contribute to debate at the national and international levels on the roles and contributions of volunteerism, with a view to increasing awareness of the need for official support to voluntary action; the second has been to develop and disseminate guidelines on a range of substantive volunteer-related topics, including on volunteerism and capacity-building, the private sector, infrastructure, legislation, youth, the Common Country Assessment and United Nations Development Assistance Framework process and the Millennium Development Goals; the third has been to encourage sharing information and networking through the World Volunteer Web portal; and the fourth has been to respond to requests from countries for technical cooperation in a range of fields concerned with promoting volunteerism. Undertaking the above activities has been facilitated by proactively building up partnerships with a broad range of stakeholders from Governments to civil society and the private sector.

IV. Conclusions and recommendations

43. **Four years on from the end of the International Year of Volunteers there are reliable indications that the momentum built up over the course of a very**

successful International Year continues to provide the stimulation behind a vibrant and expanding volunteer movement. Levels of awareness are growing in many countries in all regions, which is expected to translate into increased numbers of people participating in voluntary activity. Governments, the media and the private sector are increasingly vocal in their support for volunteering. Infrastructure is being developed to facilitate volunteerism, both in terms of the human capital needed to recruit, train and support volunteers and in terms of the physical structures to sustain and enhance those activities. The legislative environment is becoming increasingly supportive of volunteering and the contribution that volunteering makes to individuals and societies is increasingly recognized.

44. These global trends vary widely, however, between countries and regions. In the least developed countries in Africa and in countries undergoing profound social, economic and political change, volunteering is lower on the agenda of Governments than in other parts of the world. In Eastern Europe and Latin America, recognition of the potential of volunteering as an integral part of the democratization process is growing. In a number of countries in these regions, the trend towards formalizing the position and role of volunteers through legislation is becoming more pronounced. In some cases, countries are moving beyond that stage and investing in infrastructure such as networks of volunteer centres and improvements in volunteer management capacity. The situation within the United Nations system is also a mixed one. The present report has highlighted innovative and promising initiatives on the part of some organizations but there is much to do to increase recognition of the role of voluntary action within each organization's area of specialization and to develop strategies to build on this vast resource for peace and development. Overall, the situation is one of commendable progress, but with much still to do.

45. Information on volunteerism drawn from various sources around the world and the conclusions of the present report, point to several areas where further effort is suggested, bearing in mind that the characteristics of volunteerism in any country or region are very much a function of the local social, cultural and political context and that there is no blueprint for action. In many of these areas, it would be desirable to see greater support from industrialized countries where volunteerism is often recognized and actively encouraged.

46. Further sustained effort is needed to increase awareness and recognition among policymakers and planners in developing countries of the nature of voluntary action within specific local contexts and of the contribution such action makes to societies. This should help to ensure that suitable frameworks are put in place to support and nurture volunteerism. Awareness-raising extends to donor countries, which are urged to consider support to local volunteerism in overseas aid programmes. It also extends to the private sector and to civil society organizations that involve, or could involve, volunteers. The media, in particular, has a crucial role to play and needs to be encouraged to learn from best practices in this area and increase its involvement.

47. Research on volunteer-related issues in developing countries also needs to be expanded considerably. Basic information is lacking on the scale of volunteering, the different forms it takes, the impact of cultural, economic and social perspectives and the nature of barriers to taking part in voluntary action that face some segments of the population. Governments are encouraged to fund and generally support such

research, with assistance from the United Nations system as appropriate; civil society organizations need to collaborate; and the academic community is urged to undertake research that will help fill the knowledge gaps.

48. There have been important advances in recognition of the economic dimension of voluntary action and this has, potentially, significant implications for the way that volunteerism is perceived and the extent to which it is incorporated into the mainstream of development planning. Actions to build up a knowledge base on this subject and disseminate data should be vigorously pursued by Governments, with support from civil society. At the same time, it is important not to lose sight of the vital contribution volunteerism makes to the social fabric of communities and nations, reinforcing trust and solidarity and offering one front in the fight against exclusion.

49. Promotional work should continue and intensify, building on successful experiences in the recent past. Governments, civil society organizations and the media all have important roles to play. More efforts are needed to disseminate information about the rich diversity of voluntary action, stressing the value of all forms of voluntary participation, including mutual aid and campaigning alongside service-oriented volunteer work. In this context, the linkages between volunteerism at the national and local levels and efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals need to be highlighted. Efforts to focus International Volunteer Day on the Goals on the one hand and the growth of the World Volunteer Web portal on the other, with the active support of the United Nations Volunteers, are positive developments and should continue. The feasibility of periodic reviews of the global status of volunteerism that would take stock and highlight major developments in voluntary action around the world and provide inputs for United Nations publications, might also be considered.

50. The present report has provided many examples of how voluntary action is being facilitated at all levels. In many instances, the introduction of supportive legislative and fiscal frameworks may play a critical role, either through the creation of specific volunteering legislation or through ensuring that other legislation and public policy is supportive of volunteering. Governments should be proactive when considering the status of legislation in their countries as regards its impact on volunteerism and civil society should be consulted when legislation is being formulated.

51. There are multiple needs, especially in developing countries, for human and physical infrastructure to ensure all segments of the population have access to meaningful and properly supported volunteer opportunities. In many cases, this will require a political decision with financial implications. Governments might consider, in consultation with civil society, the nature of infrastructure that will be most effective in building up the potential for volunteerism in their countries. The United Nations system has a role to play in the various sectors to help to plan for and design appropriate infrastructure. Here and elsewhere, the private sector is starting to expand its involvement in volunteerism in developing countries, building on experience in industrialized countries; Governments have a role to play in encouraging this trend.

52. The need to work towards a broad-based volunteer movement has been highlighted. Young people are and will continue to be a priority in many countries. This is understandable and every effort should be made to provide opportunities for

youth to participate in the life of their society through volunteerism. However, Governments, supported by the United Nations system, should recognize the needs and potential of all segments of the population to participate through voluntary action and should actively facilitate such action.

53. The present report has described advances made in networking activities, including building partnerships and sharing good practices. Volunteer networks have been established in a number of countries, but in many others there have been difficulties in getting started. The United Nations Volunteers can provide support at the country level, advising on such networking and facilitating appropriate arrangements where desired. It can also continue to build up the capacity of its World Volunteer Web with a view to using it as a tool to strengthen capacities at the country level.

54. For the United Nations system as a whole, a sound step forward was taken during the International Year of Volunteers with the issuance of a publication entitled *Volunteering and the United Nations System*, which looked at the broad spread of volunteerism in its many and diverse forms throughout the system. The findings, conclusions and recommendations in that publication are of concern to most United Nations organizations. Since 2001, there are indications that United Nations system organizations are increasingly recognizing, facilitating and promoting volunteerism as an integral part of their work, but this trend needs to be reinforced and broadened.

55. The International Year of Volunteers played a very important part in raising awareness in many countries as regards the role and contribution of voluntary action in almost every sphere of human development and led, in many cases, to the introduction or strengthening of proactive approaches at the national level to supporting voluntary action. These developments need to be sustained and extended to cover all countries if the potential of volunteerism to help to meet the Millennium Development Goals is to be fully realized. In that connection, the General Assembly may wish to consider marking the tenth anniversary of the International Year of Volunteers in 2011 as a means of taking stock of progress made over a decade of follow-up to the Year, celebrating successes and considering the challenges that still remain.

Notes

[1] United Nations publication, Sales No. E.03.XVII.9.

[2] See General Assembly resolution S-24/2, annex.

[3] See *Report of the Second World Assembly on Ageing, Madrid, 8-12 April 2002* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.02.IV.4), chap. I, resolution 1, annex II.

[4] See *Report of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg, South Africa, 26 August-4 September 2002* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.03.II.A.1 and corrigendum), chap. I, resolution 1, annex.

[5] See A/C.2/59/3, annex.

[6] See A/CONF.206/6.